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RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0250
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0092
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TAGS: PREL SNAR XL XM CO VE NL

SUBJECT: DUTCH FOREIGN MINISTER EXPRESSES SUPPORT FOR COLOMBIAN PEACE PROCESS

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Over dinner on October 18, Dutch Foreign Minister Bot said Latin America needed strong regional and multilateral institutions to navigate its future and fortify democratic values. As a Caribbean neighbor, the Netherlands was prepared to help advance this process. The Netherlands has been supportive of the GOC demobilization process and contributed bilaterally to the OAS verification mission. In that vein, Bot probed the Ambassador on the utility of continued extraditions and whether at some point, they could obstruct rather than stimulate progress toward peace. Bot also expressed concern over Venezuelan interference in Dutch possessions in the Caribbean and in the region as a whole. He worried more about Chavez's resources and the spread of his populist ideology, than the prospect of any military action by Venezuela. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Ambassador Wood met with Dutch Foreign Minister Ben Bot on October 18 during the latter's 48-hour visit to Bogota. Bot was accompanied by MFA Director General for Political Affairs Hugo Siblesz, MFA Director of the Western Hemisphere Department Marion Kappeyne, Spokesperson Herman van Gelderen, and Dutch Ambassador to Colombia Frans van Haren. Ambassador Wood was accompanied by polcouns (notetaker). Bot met with President Uribe, Defense Minister Ospina and Foreign Minister Barco, among others. At the end of his visit, he released a statement praising Colombia for its ongoing efforts to maintain the peace process. His next stop was Aruba.

Comments on Latin America

¶3. (C) Bot said Latin America needed the kind of regional institutions that had saved and developed in Europe over the last 30 years. Bot served in Argentina in the 1970s and recalled lengthy discussions about strengthening regional and multilateral institutions in the region to develop democratic norms, standards and ideals. Unfortunately, compared to Europe, little progress had been made. Bot said the Netherlands, as a Caribbean neighbor, was prepared to work with democratic nations in Latin America and the U.S. to help advance this process. Bot acknowledged that most Europeans still did not understand the reality of Latin America and of Colombia, in particular, and often made decisions based upon

out-dated thinking. In that vein, he believed President Uribe was a serious interlocutor and leading Colombia in the right direction. Wood noted that Uribe had succeeded in conveying to the population that they did not have to continue living with a four-front war and that things could and would get better.

Extradition

¶4. (C) Bot said the Netherlands supported the peace process in Colombia, including the ongoing paramilitary demobilizations. For this reason, it had stepped ahead of its European partners and was supporting the OAS verification mission. He questioned, however, whether the pressure of extradition to the United States would at some point begin to hinder the process. He noted that, at the end of various conflicts in Africa, the prospect of rebel leaders being extradited often discouraged their demobilization. If we use the weapon too much, he wondered, could it not discourage future progress. Wood responded that paramilitaries leaders had been doing their best to juxtapose extradition and the peace process but had not succeeded. The Justice and Peace Law left the door open for extradition, something the paras were beginning to figure out, and they remained terrified of being extradited to the U.S. So far, this had been useful leverage for the GOC.

Venezuela

¶5. (C) With Dutch possessions bordering Venezuelan waters, Bot expressed concern about Chavez's growing interference in the region. He stressed that Chavez's influence was military, philosophical and ideological and that his message was resonating. Chavez was using his &fat checkbook8 to ingratiate himself in the Netherlands Antilles and in Suriname. Bot noted that Minister of Defense Ospina had told him earlier in the day that Chavez had begun funding opposition groups in Colombia and members of the illegal armed groups were crossing the border into Venezuela daily. Bot said he was not concerned about the possibility of GOV military action but rather the spread of his populist ideology. He wondered, with many national elections scheduled over the next year, how large a segment of the population in the region was open to Chavez's philosophy. The Hague wished to work with the U.S. to address this issue.

War on Drugs

¶6. (C) Bot said the key to resolving the internal conflict in Colombia was attacking the drug problem head on. The FARC, the paras and the narcos were all financing their operations with drugs. He understood that the U.S. and Colombia had a clear philosophy and plan for addressing the issue and hoped that it would work in the long term. He noted that the Netherlands was facing similar challenges in Afghanistan. Wood agreed and noted that the Afghans had visited to review the Colombian program.

Comment

¶7. (C) Over the last month, the Dutch Justice, Defense and Foreign Ministers have visited Colombia. The Hague, in part thanks to its activist ambassador here, has made a concerted effort to underscore its interest and become pro-active in helping Colombia move forward. From the vantage point of Embassy Bogota, the Dutch have become solid partners in the search for peace in Colombia and are lobbying European partners to be more supportive of the demobilization process.

Wood told Bot that the U.S. had agreed to provide funding to the demobilization program although several internal steps still had to be completed. Bot responded that Norway and Sweden were considering financial contributions to the

demobilization process and that the Netherlands, along with Sweden, was working on encouraging Chile (with OAS Secretary General Insulza's help) and other Latin nations to engage as well. With Caribbean possessions bordering Venezuela and growing concern in the Hague over Chavez's meddling, the Dutch can also prove to be useful collaborators in dealing with Venezuela and furthering regional stability.

WOOD